

04/06/23 • BIG PHARMA › NEWS

# Autism Awareness Month: Health Officials, Media Focus on 'Inclusivity' Not Prevention, Experts Say

*April is World Autism Month, prompting key public health figures and prominent media outlets to celebrate autistic children and focus on the importance of inclusivity. But missing from that conversation, experts say, is a discussion of how autism can be prevented.*

**By Michael Nevradakis, Ph.D.**

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April is World Autism Month, prompting key public health figures and prominent media outlets to celebrate autistic children and focus on the importance of — and commitment to — inclusivity.

Missing from most official statements and media coverage, however, is a discussion of how autism can be prevented in the first place — and what its root causes might be.

For its part, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a new set of autism-related initiatives — though its officials appear to be relying on underestimated figures on the prevalence of autism globally.

Experts who spoke with The Defender called out the WHO's estimates and its recently released training materials intended for caregivers of autistic children. Some argued that Autism Speaks — the nonprofit that developed the materials — has a questionable track record when it comes to tackling the full scope of issues related to autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

## **Focus on 'inclusivity' instead of prevalence and prevention**

A March 31 proclamation issued by President Joe Biden “recognize[d] the achievements of neurodiverse people” and reiterated the administration’s “commitment to supporting the equal rights and dignity of all those on the autism spectrum.”

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres issued a statement saying, “We must do better — by promoting inclusive education, equal employment opportunities, self-determination, and an environment where every person is respected.”

The U.N.’s theme for this year’s World Autism Awareness Day was “Transformation: Toward a Neuro-Inclusive World for All.”

An April 4 USA Today article stated, “April is here, and so is Autism Acceptance Month!,” calling it “a time for uplifting autistic voices and sharing in the community’s joy. ... Acceptance, at the end of the day, is going to promote more inclusivity.”

The U.N.’s March 29 fact sheet on ASD contained similar rhetoric, focusing on the need for “actions at community and societal levels for greater accessibility, inclusivity and support.”

The U.N. fact sheet also claimed that “about 1 in 100 children has autism,” citing a March 2022 study.

The study qualifies this statement, however by saying: “This estimate represents an average figure, and reported prevalence varies substantially across studies. Some well-controlled studies have, however, reported figures that are substantially higher.”

The 2022 study also claimed:

“Available epidemiological data conclude that there is no evidence of a causal association between measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, and autism. Previous studies suggesting a causal link were found to be filled with methodological flaws.

“There is also no evidence to suggest that any other childhood vaccine may increase the risk of autism.”

By comparison, a study published March 24 in Surveillance Summaries — shared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and reported on by major media including The New York Times — found that in 2020, “one in 36 children aged 8 years (approximately 4% of boys and 1% of girls) was estimated to have ASD.”

The Times described these increases as a “long-running trend,” although with the qualifier that such increases “could stem from other factors, such as increased awareness and screening.”

### **WHO ‘training materials’ for caregivers of autistic children ignore core medical issues**

Two days after publishing its autism fact sheet, the WHO released a set of training materials “for caregivers of children with developmental delays or disabilities, including autism.”

The materials include “pre-recorded information sessions” on a variety of topics related to childhood learning, engagement and well-being, and “quick tip videos, quizzes and reminders ... to support sustained learning.”

The training materials will be accompanied by “the launch of manuals that support in-person sessions of the training programme” later this month.

According to the WHO:

“The programme, which has already been piloted in face-to-face format in more than 30 countries, such as Brazil, India, Italy and Kenya, teaches parents and other caregivers day-to-day skills that help boost the well-being and development of children with autism and other developmental disabilities.”

The training program “has been developed with the collaboration of the nongovernmental organization, Autism Speaks, [and] has been specifically designed to be implemented by non-specialist providers, which is particularly helpful in low-resource communities.”

Autism experts who spoke with The Defender took issue with the materials and Autism Speaks’ involvement in them.

Polly Tommey, co-producer of “Vaxxed: From Cover-Up to Catastrophe” and CHD.TV

programming manager, told The Defender:

"Autism Speaks never addresses the core issues with the majority of children diagnosed with autism. Our children are medically sick, most often with severe gut issues, encephalitis, among a host of other critical health issues.

"Instead of helping parents address this, calling for real answers to address the child's clear pain — hence thrashing heads on anything they can find, high pitch pain screams, etc., Autism Speaks constantly puts out so-called solutions to teach your child to sit, talk, walk, etc.

"Could you learn anything living in severe pain?"

Brian Hooker, Ph.D., P.E., chief scientific officer for Children's Health Defense, shared Tommey's sentiment. He told The Defender:

"AS [Autism Speaks] officials know that vaccines cause autism and they work actively to cover up that relationship.

"In some ways, they're worse than the CDC, as they pretend to help families with autism, but they dismiss anything that is helpful (biomedical interventions) and actively hide the root causes of the disability."

In a December 2021 article for The Defender, Toby Rogers, Ph.D., whose doctoral thesis, "The Political Economy of Autism," explored the regulatory history of five classes of toxicants that increase autism risk, noted that "Autism Speaks brought in \$94.7 million in 2020 and accomplished absolutely nothing."

On a similar note, Hooker told The Defender:

"The vast majority of donations raised by AS go into salary and infrastructure, with precious little going to actually helping families.

"This is the legacy of AS and they have actively covered up a causal relationship ever since while robbing unsuspecting donors of precious funds that could go to help families and to find answers."

Tommey also did not hold back in her criticism of Autism Speaks and the WHO. She said:

"We the parents have had to become doctors and work it out ourselves. Once we address the gut, etc., then the children improve.

"[Autism Speaks] spends a fortune on 'solutions' that make no sense, therefore leaving the parents desperate and rejected instead of doing what CHD does: real solutions for people with autism.

"The WHO and AS are a complete disgrace to the autism community. What's it going to take? How big has the number of people diagnosed got to be? Autism destroys lives and families. It has to stop."

**WHO, CDC won't conduct sound studies on impact of vaccines on children's health**

Further data presented by the CDC, citing a 2019 study in Pediatrics, stated "About 1 in 6 (17%) children aged 3-17 years were diagnosed with a developmental disability, as reported by parents, during a study period of 2009-2017. These included autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, blindness, and cerebral palsy, among others."

Barbara Loe Fisher, co-founder and president of the National Vaccine Information Center (NVIC) and co-author of the 1985 book "DPT: A Shot in the Dark," took issue with the WHO's statements — and with agencies such as the CDC.

Fisher told The Defender:

"WHO officials, like CDC officials, refuse to conduct methodologically sound epidemiological studies comparing health outcomes of children who receive six dozen doses of federally recommended vaccines with the health outcomes of children who remain partially vaccinated or unvaccinated, to determine the prevalence of autism in both groups.

"They refuse to fund biological mechanism studies to determine at the molecular and cellular level what happens in the bodies of healthy children who regress and develop autism after being vaccinated."

Fisher referred to a 2013 report published by the Institute of Medicine, part of the National Academy of Sciences, that concluded "there is not enough scientific evidence to determine if the recommended child vaccine schedule is or is not associated with the development of autism," Fisher noted.

A Jan. 16, 2013, NVIC press release supported some — though not all — of the findings of the Institute of Medicine's report.

This included recommendations calling on federal health officials to:

- Assess evidence about public confidence in the federally recommended child vaccine schedule.
- Define potential vaccine adverse health outcomes and populations biologically at increased susceptibility for suffering vaccine reactions and injury.
- Make evaluating the safety of the child vaccine schedule a scientific research priority.

The NVIC did not support two of the Institute of Medicine's recommendations, including that "prospective clinical trials, including cohort trials, are not useful for examining the safety of the child vaccine schedule" and the "recommendation that future vaccine safety research be conducted by DHHS [Department of Health and Human Services] and its corporate partners using existing closed database systems."

Fisher told The Defender the link between autism and vaccination has been known at least as far back as 1985, when "DPT: A Shot in the Dark" was released.

The book "suggested that children developing inflammation of the brain (encephalitis/encephalopathy) following receipt of whole cell pertussis vaccine in DPT shots can develop chronic neurological dysfunction that includes symptoms of autism."

According to Fisher, "Anecdotal evidence continues to accumulate that reactions to certain vaccines, such as DPT/DTaP, MMR and hepatitis B, can cause brain dysfunction that takes the form of autism."

Yet the number of vaccines listed on the CDC childhood vaccination schedule has sharply increased compared to the vaccination requirements of the mid-1980s," Fisher said.

She said:

"However, the WHO and global medical community continue to deny the association and sweep that evidence under the rug, while giving no credible explanation for why the prevalence of autism has dramatically increased in the U.S. over the past four decades from one child in 2,500 to 1 child in 36, which coincides with the tripling of the numbers of doses of vaccines infants and children are given in conformance with the government's recommended childhood vaccine schedule."

A study published in Cureus Feb. 2 found a positive statistical correlation between infant mortality rates and the number of vaccine doses received by babies — confirming findings made by the same researchers a decade ago.

The study noted that the U.S., along with Greece, required the most vaccines (26) for infants, of any country.

## SUGGEST A CORRECTION

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Michael Nevradakis, Ph.D., based in Athens, Greece, is a senior reporter for The Defender and part of the rotation of hosts for CHD.TV's "Good Morning CHD."

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